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Church History

OF

Audubon-Oaks-Perkiomen

Church History

OF

Audubon-Oaks-Perkiomen

Montgomery County, Pa.

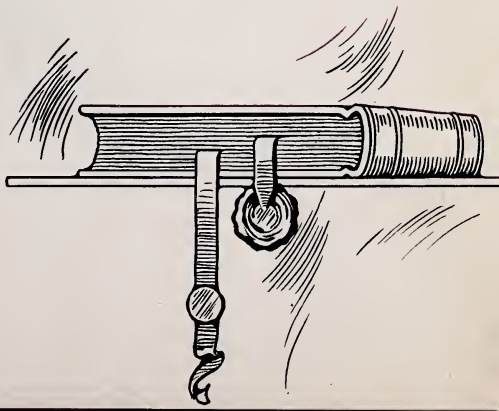
Pennsylvania

1829-1909

Written and Privately Printed by

CALEB CRESSON, Jr.

1909



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Foreword

IN presenting this sketch, the writer is quite aware that many improvements might have been made both as to text and pictures. The difficulties involved by waiting until everything should be perfectly satisfactory, however, offered such possibilities of delay and uncertainties regarding its definite publication, that it seemed expedient—in order to accomplish anything—to proceed at once.

This sketch is therefore now presented in a manner not altogether satisfactory to the compiler, yet with the hope that it may, at least, be of sufficient interest to hold the attention of those whose affections for the Church may pardon any shortcomings in its compilation.

The compiler desires to particularly acknowledge the kindly encouragement and assistance of the following persons:

To his father, Caleb Cresson, for the inspiration of his fifty years of uninterrupted attendance upon Divine Worship, and the splendid executive administration displayed in parish activities. To him, more than to any other person, is given credit for having formed the connecting links in the remarkable chain of events herein recorded; for there were numerous occasions when the continuity of the narrative would have been broken, had he not continued regularly steadfast in the parish administration. He has always given of his means as well as time.

To his kinsman, William Henry Wetherill, a grandson of the founder of the parish, who has ever held its traditions and associations in tender affection, the compiler, also, owes a deep debt of gratitude for encouragement and generosity most heartily given.

To another kinsman and descendant of the parish founder, Charles Wetherill, the compiler is also indebted for suggestions of much valuable information, particularly concerning the Reverend James May, D.D.

Caleb Cresson, Jr.

Along the Perkiomen,
near Oaks, Pa.

A Church History

IT has been said that "God made the country and man made the town." Truly the beauty in the handiwork of the Almighty which it is the pride of man to approach is not within man's power to reach.

A country landscape, with its hues that change with the season, cannot be transferred to paper or to canvas. The invigorating breezes of the early morning, the music of the birds or the lowing of the contented kine at nightfall, can only be appreciated in those whose souls have been reached by these particular charms. Even the buds that are cultivated by members of a family and that seem to shed a richer fragrance because they are home-grown, represent a care that can indeed be measured and therefore form an unbreakable link to bind human hearts in the love of nature and fullest appreciation of the Divine Providential Blessings.

Contemplating upon such thoughts, there is brought vividly before our minds the realization of many good deeds done and now being accomplished in the cause of Christianity by devoted "Children of the Heavenly King," and as the result of such devotion and faith, there stands

MILL GROVE FARM HOUSE
WHERE THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL WAS STARTED IN 1829

to-day not far from Mill Grove Farm House,* on the Perkiomen Creek, a quaint old stone building, which is a "House-of-Prayer-for-all-People," so called "Union Church."

Feelings of rest and peace enter the hearts of not a few persons who visit this historic place of Divine Worship, for there are associated here tenderest memories of many good Christian people, and one feels that this indeed is "hallowed ground." Here does the weary soul find rest and quietness, far away from the turmoil of the busy city life. Here may be heard the songs of the birds which Audubon loved to study as these sweet little winged choristers, which dwell among the grand old trees about the sacred building, sing the songs which one readily imagines tell of Peace, Good-Will to all men in the name of the Blessed Trinity.

It was primarily in order to encourage the worship of the Blessed Trinity, that on September 13th, 1830, the foundation-stone of this old church was laid. For several years prior to this date, Mrs. Rachel Wetherill, a devout member of the Episcopal Church, had established a Sunday School which she nurtured and strengthened by her own pious labors, at first holding

* Mill Grove was formerly owned by John James Audubon, the great ornithologist, and was his first home in America. The village and post-office nearby now bear his name.

Rachel Wetherill, 1829

FOUNDER OF THE PARISH AND PART OF ENDOWMENTS

TAKEN FROM OIL PAINTING BY SULLY

meetings in the old Audubon homestead, Mill Grove Farm, which had been purchased by her husband, Samuel Wetherill (3d of the name).

Although advanced in life, Mrs. Wetherill was the prime mover in having the church built. It is said that she helped in person to haul stone for the foundations. The kindly Christian spirit of Trinitarian unity, which exists in this Parish to-day, was evidenced at that time by the co-operation on the part of friends and neighbors, many of whom aided in the work of building the church, for the worship of the Blessed Trinity, by freely giving labor and donations of material. The early missionary work and financial support of the church, however, must be attributed almost entirely to four persons, whose names can never be forgotten in this Parish—Mrs. Rachel Wetherill, her daughter, Mrs. Rebecca Gumbes, and a grandson, Samuel Wetherill Gumbes, together with his Godly wife, Mrs. Frances S. Dring Macomb Gumbes. Their works do follow them and may it never be said that their labors were in vain.

Patiently teaching and training the poor, lowly country children, who were in those days almost entirely separated from any educational or social environments of an uplifting nature, these good Christian people began a work which has resulted in the Parish of to-day. Their de-

EXTRACT FROM THE WILL
OF
RACHEL WETHERILL
DATED
DECEMBER 18th, 1843
REGARDING THE
CHURCH IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY
AT
AUDUBON, PENNA.

"Item, I give devise and bequeath to my Grandson Samuel W. Gumbes, his Heirs and Assigns, my lot or piece of ground and Church thereon erected, situate, lying, and being in Montgomery County and State of Pennsylvania aforesaid, To have and to hold the same with all singular the appurtenances, unto the said Samuel W. Gumbes, his Heirs and Assigns forever. In Trust nevertheless, to, for and upon the following use, interest and purpose, that is to say, upon Trust, that he the said Samuel W. Gumbes, his Heirs and Assigns, shall and will from time to time and at all times forever, permit and suffer the said Church to be used and occupied as a Church for Trinitarian Worship free from any charge whatever, and for no other use, intent or purpose, whatever.

"And for the purpose of keeping the said Church in suitable and good repair and for the further purpose of paying all expenses for opening, cleaning and maintaining the same as an Orderly House of Worship aforesaid, I do hereby empower, order and direct, my Executors hereinafter named, to pay to the said Samuel W. Gumbes, the sum of Two Thousand Dollars, which sum of Two Thousand Dollars, is to be held in Trust, by the said Samuel W. Gumbes, his Executors, Administrators and Assigns, to be placed out at Interest in some safe Investment and the Income arising therefrom to go, and be applied to the purposes above mentioned, Forever, and to and for no other use, intent, or purpose whatever.

"And I do hereby further authorize and do empower my Executors hereinafter named, to effect a perpetual Insurance on the Church above mentioned, and assign the Policy of Insurance to the said Samuel W. Gumbes his Heirs and Assigns in Trust forever as aforesaid."

scendants are in the present (6th) generation endeavoring to maintain this good work which they, one and all, feel is their sacred privilege to carry on to the Glory of God and in blessed memory of those Saints who have gone to partake of the joys of their Lord.

This Christian Missionary work, which in later years was to result in the organization of St. Paul's Memorial Church Parish, but which had begun with Mrs. Wetherill's work in her own home, was much strengthened by the opening of the "House-of-Prayer-for-all-People" for Trinitarian Worship during the summer of 1832. Owing to the fact that Mrs. Wetherill and many members of her family were "Church-people," those who most frequently officiated were clergymen of the Protestant Episcopal Church; but from the early days we have traditional knowledge that ministers of Protestant organizations were permitted to preach the gospel of Christ provided their doctrine was in accord with the belief in the Trinity. As long as there was no organization or responsible authority to head the missionary work thus started, there were, of course, no recorded results, and as long as only visiting clergy officiated, the work was unsystematic and only sporadic seed was sown, but enough fell on good ground to bring forth abundant fruit in later years.

"Union Church," Audubon
built by rachel wetherill, 1829–32

the rector of the parish continues to hold
regular services. photo taken 1908

Perhaps it may be interesting to note that there are no known records of any regular services having been held in this old church other than those conducted in accordance with the Book of Common Prayer and by clergy of the Episcopal Church. During Mrs. Wetherill's lifetime, she provided that stated regular services by clergymen of the Episcopal Church should be held.

As has been said before, practically the whole expense of maintaining this church as a reverent Place of Worship was borne by Mrs. Wetherill's family, and the neighbors and friends of moderate means in the vicinity were encouraged to come and hear the Gospel message, without money and without price. This was the general policy followed, and gradually resulted in one or two persons carrying all the burden of the expenses, and it became necessary that there should be a Leading Head in the management of the church affairs. It may be seen, therefore, that even in these early days it was soon found impractical to have a place of Divine Worship to be used by everyone without a guiding influence and management. It was essential that there might be continued harmony in the community, and therefore was evidenced the need for a man who would alone appeal to everybody and whose words and actions might

Interior of "Union Church," Audubon

photo taken 1908

be universally acceptable. That man was Samuel Wetherill Gumbes. He had labored almost as a clergyman amongst the people in this vicinity. He was loved and respected by everybody, and sincere spirituality permeated all his actions. Like his mother and grandmother, he was a devout member of the Episcopal Church, and being blessed with temporal means, he devoted himself to furthering the cause of Christ, especially among the people about him. He started a library and gave free instructions in astronomy, explaining his lectures with colored stereopticon views which were rare in those days.

He also was intensely interested in the forming of musical classes and endeavored by his kindly, gentle Christian spirit to elevate the social life of his tenants and neighbors. Hence it was not strange that when a strong leader was required to administer the temporal matters and provide for the spiritual welfare of the church, no man could have been chosen to fill that position better than Samuel Wetherill Gumbes. It must be remembered that this section of the country in those days was without railroad conveniences, and postal communications also were very limited. At this time and for many years after, the communication with Philadelphia was by stage to Norristown and from there by rail. The stage carried the mail from Port Provi-

Samuel Wetherill Gumbes and Wife
Frances S. D. M. Gumbes

PARISH LAY READER AND FIRST TRUSTEE OF
"UNION CHURCH."
OWNER OF "OAKLAND CHAPEL"

PHOTO TAKEN ABOUT 1850

dence, Shannonville (now Audubon) and Jeffersonville, coming down early in the morning and returning in the afternoon, that is, when the state of the roads permitted. These public highways were always either muddy or dusty in summer, and in winter and the early spring they were often completely blocked either by snowdrifts or mud-holes. Mr. Gumbes' work was therefore particularly praiseworthy, for many a heart was led to seek the Lord by the evangelistic ministrations of this good man, who assisted all who sought the aid of his advice and means. Consequently he was appointed by Mrs. Wetherill (his grandmother) to be the first trustee of this church, and to his heirs and assigns was given the custody of the church.

An interesting episode is authenticated as having been the cause of his appointment. It appears that the use of the church had been abused by a certain preacher, not an Episcopalian however, who expounded doctrine contrary to the belief in the Trinity and announced that he would again explain his teachings at the evening services to follow; whereupon Mr. Gumbes arose and stated that such preaching was most certainly distasteful and against the wishes of Mrs. Wetherill, and she, being the patron of the church, should first be consulted. Mr. Gumbes, it is stated, then locked the church

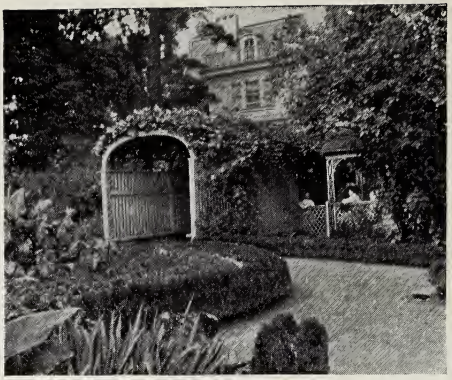
doors and, taking the keys to Mrs. Wetherill, explained the matter. She was so pleased with his decision, knowing his usual deliberation before taking any determined action, that she not only showed her approval of his assuming charge of the building during her life, but also by her will granted him discretionary powers, with authority to act for years to come. The trusteeship of the church and leading associations of the church work in the Parish have therefore remained to be carried on and assisted by the hands of his descendants.

Rachel Wetherill died in 1844. By her will she founded the endowment fund for the maintenance of the church she had so materially assisted to build.

About a mile from the old church and across the Perkiomen Creek can be found to-day "Oakland Hall," surrounded by a fertile farm and wooded estate. "Oakland Hall" was the country home of Mrs. Wetherill's grandson, Samuel Wetherill Gumbes, and had been presented to him by his mother, Mrs. Rebecca Gumbes (Mrs. Wetherill's daughter), when, in 1836, he married Frances Sarah Dring Macomb, the daughter of John William and Isabella Ramsay Macomb.

With pious and devout associations and again with a view of developing practical missionary work looking towards the spiritual ad-

vancement of the people, many of whom were his tenants, this noble man, Samuel W. Gumbes, and his good wife had already become, as has been shown, the mainstay, chief workers and leaders in continuing the Church services. Each Sunday would find this good man and his wife regular in their attendance at Divine services, and upon occasions when no visiting clergy were obtainable, the services of the Church were read by this good layman, who was indeed a man full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. During these early days Mr. and Mrs. Gumbes also started a Sunday School at "Oakland Hall" for those children who could not attend the services at the old church, because the Sunday School at the old church was discontinued after Mrs. Wetherill's death. This Sunday School first met in the summer time out-of-doors, under the cool shade of the grape arbor, which to-day serves as an entrance to the attractive, old-fashioned flower garden at "Oakland Hall." When the weather was inclement the Sunday School services were held in the basement of the "Hall." Every Bishop of the Diocese of Pennsylvania has been entertained at "Oakland Hall" with the exception of Bishop White, who died in 1836, the same year in which Oakland Hall was built. Could these walls of the "Hall" speak, they would tell us of the many times when through



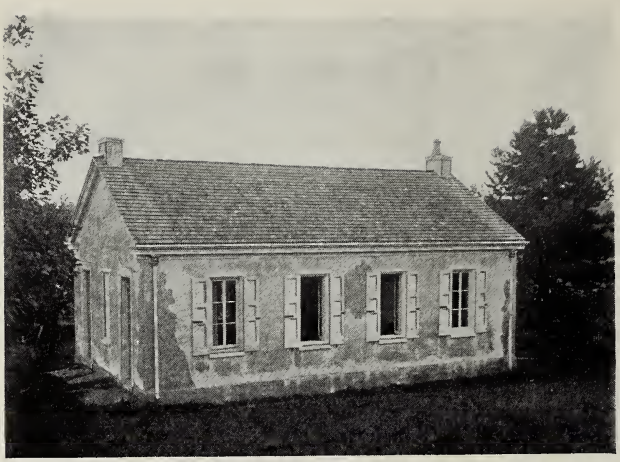
View of "Oakland Hall" Gardens
Built 1836

SAMUEL W. GUMBES AND WIFE HELD A SUNDAY-SCHOOL IN THE ARBOR REGULARLY IN THE SUMMER MONTHS UNTIL 1852, WHEN THEY BUILT THE "OAKLAND CHAPEL." PHOTO TAKEN 1908.

them resounded the voices of the clergy and Bishops of Christ's Church, who were entertained by the hospitable host and hostess, whose main object in life was to do good.

Of the early officiating clergy it may be interesting to note the names of the Rev. G. W. Ridgely, Rev. William N. Diehl, Rev. Rees C. Evans, Rev. W. R. Carroll, Rev. William Philips, Rev. Richard Newton, Rev. Jacob Douglass, Rev. Dr. Wm. A. Muhlenberg, Rev. Dr. Fowles, Rev. Dr. Richard Hall, the Rev. Samuel E. Appleton and Rev. Alfred Elwyn. The Bishops of the Diocese also occasionally held confirmations. But so successful was the work which had also been started at "Oakland Hall," that in 1852 Mr. Gumbes built a little chapel on his lawn and determined to start a Parish organization comprised of the two places of worship.

In this little chapel Mr. Gumbes delighted to do his missionary work, assisted by his wife and the visiting clergy, who were continually associated in this work. In 1852, or the year that the Oakland Chapel was built, the Rev. George Mintzer (who had for several years prior to that date been Rector of St. James' Perkiomen Church, near the village of Evansburg, Pa., which is about five miles distant from "Oakland Hall") was requested to take charge and establish a regular mission of the Church by holding



The Day That "Oakland Chapel" Was Removed
June, 1896

The stones of this building now compose the Memorial to Mr. and Mrs. Gumbes, built as a transept to St. Paul's, the Memorial Church at Oaks to Rev. Dr. May.

services at the so-called Union Church and in the Oakland Chapel. He ministered to the spiritual edification of those persons attending the two places of Divine Worship. After Mrs. Rachel Wetherill's death, the Rev. George Mintzer's financial maintenance was guaranteed by Mrs. Rebecca Gumbes and her son, Samuel Wetherill Gumbes. It was due to Mr. Mintzer's organizing ability that the congregations meeting in the two places of worship became a Mission of the Church, and admission to the Diocesan Convention as a self-supporting Parish was steadily contemplated, but not realized until 1869. Mrs. Rebecca Gumbes was so gratified with the results shown by Mr. Mintzer's earnest work and the untiring interest of her son, Samuel Wetherill Gumbes, and his good wife, that she purchased a house for a Rectory wherein the Rev. Mr. Mintzer might dwell. Here the good parson ended his earthly labors. This Rectory, along with the Sunday School building, which had already been built by her son, is to be credited to a desire on the part of Mrs. Rebecca Gumbes for the spiritual good of the neighborhood; not a mere sentiment, but a practical, permanent principle surviving in the daughter of precious memory no less than in her mother, Mrs. Rachel Wetherill, and we trust still surviving and to survive in the generations yet to come.

REBECCA GUMBES
DAUGHTER OF RACHEL WETHERILL

MRS. GUMBES BUILT THE CHURCH AT OAKS, ALSO GAVE RECTORY AND MAJOR ENDOWMENT. PHOTO TAKEN ABOUT 1860.

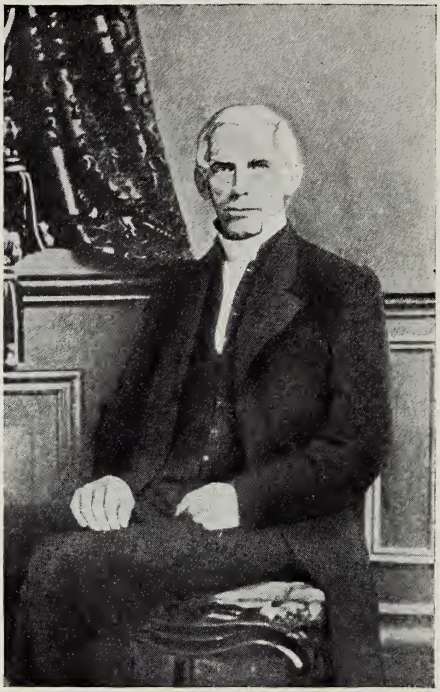
PHOTO TAKEN ABOUT 1857, SHOWING "PORTE COCHÈRE," OAKLAND HALL

The figures, reading from left to right, are: Bella Gumbes (later Mrs. Caleb Cresson), Mrs. Bloomfield, Rev. Dr. Muhlenberg (Founder of St. Luke's Hospital, New York), Mrs. Rebecca Gumbes, Miss E. W. Hall (niece of Rev. George Mintzer), Miss Shief on either side of Rev. Mr. Cruzey, and Mrs. Samuel W. Gumbes (known later as Mrs. Frances Gumbes). Photo taken by Samuel W. Gumbes.

Rev. George Mintzer

rector of the parish, 1852–1861

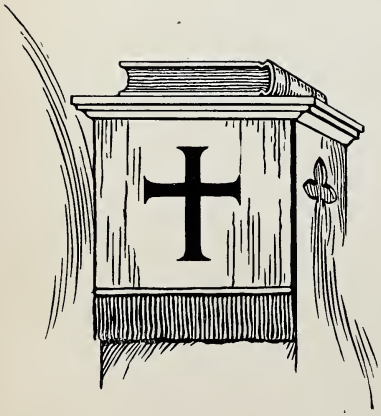
After the death of Mr. Mintzer, we next come to the name of the Rev. James May, D.D., who acted as Rector from June, 1861, to December, 1863, when he died. He was known far and wide as "Dear Dr. May," for he was as loving and kind as he was learned, as gentle as he was able. And here it is most fitting to speak briefly of this spiritual and scholarly man who, after most successful pastoral charges in Wilkes-Barre, and also in Philadelphia, became a professor in the Theological Seminary at Alexandria, Virginia, from 1842 to 1861, and during the time that Dr. May had charge of this Parish as Rector he was also a professor in the Philadelphia Divinity School. Dr. May was a quiet, unassuming Christian gentleman. In person he was tall and slender, with an erect and dignified carriage, strongly modeled features, a grave but very kindly and benign expression of countenance, rather dark complexion, and white hair. He was a man of striking and most attractive appearance. As a preacher, his most remarkable gift was the power of explaining the subject of his discourse with such clearness as to make the matter plain to the simplest understanding. He was very kind in his manner to children and young people, and was evidently much interested in them. Having conducted services in the morning, he always taught



Rev. James May, D.D.

RECTOR OF THE PARISH, 1861–63

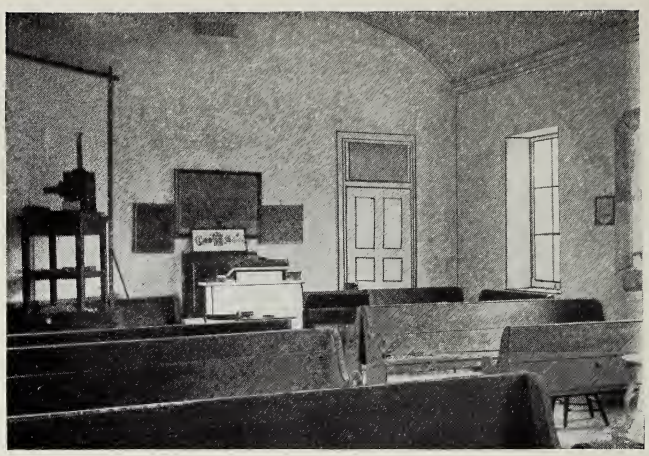
THE CHURCH AT OAKS IS A MEMORIAL TO HIM



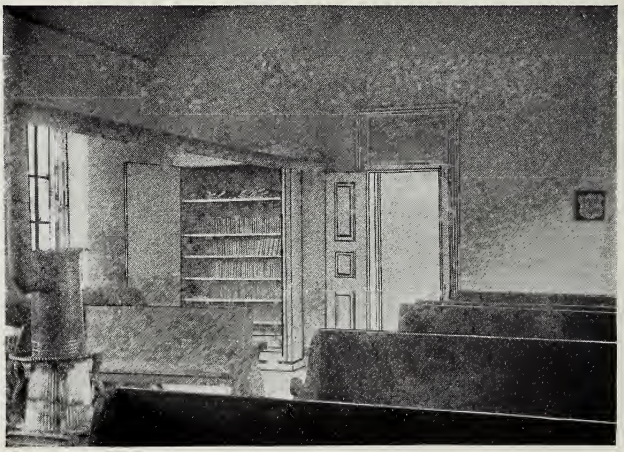
the Boys' Bible Class at the Sunday School in the afternoons, and he had the happy faculty of so attracting their affections that the boys looked forward to their Sunday School as one of their principal pleasures. The end of his work in this world was strongly characteristic. The Civil War was at its height, and thousands of wounded and sick soldiers lay suffering in the hospitals near Philadelphia. Dr. May, as might have been expected of him, visited them regularly, conducting religious services for and with them. Hospitals were at that time entirely without the modern appliances for cleanliness, antiseptic surgery and proper care against contagion, and typhus fever, called "spotted," "camp," or "hospital" fever was prevalent. The venerable doctor contracted this malady in the course of his labors for the soldiers and died after an illness of a very few days. As an Episcopal clergyman he was indeed eminent, being a forcible preacher and universally beloved. Nearly all ministers have some preferences, more or less marked. Dr. May nearly always commenced the morning service with the beautiful hymn,

"My opening eyes with rapture see
The dawn of the returning day,"

which some more recent revision has omitted from the present Church Hymnal.



Interior "Oakland Chapel"
built 1852. removed 1896



Last View of Interior of "Oakland Chapel," 1852–1896

the stones and furniture now compose the west transept to st. paul's

The following is an abstract from the "Life and Letters of Dr. May," alluding to his work in this Parish:

"The little flock taken under his instructions, he continued to look after to the last. Residing still in Philadelphia, he spent whatever holidays he could command amongst the people of his Parish, and always went up on Saturday in time to see some of them before Sunday came. His custom was to ride to Norristown, eighteen miles, in the railway and there take a stage for seven miles additional. Then he would alight and see as many of the families as possible before he rested for the night. On Sunday morning, service was held in a place of worship known as 'Union Church,' before or after which he generally contrived to have a friendly word with almost every one. Then came a hasty dinner and after it a Sunday School, in which he took a class of boys, and one who visited it said it was beautiful indeed to see the Doctor of Divinity and Professor of Church History sit meekly in that quiet country school, instructing the plain farmers' boys, their faces bent on his with eager interest and his beaming with mild benevolence, tender feeling or playful humor as he taught."

Dr. May died in 1863, closing his ministerial labors in connection with this Parish,

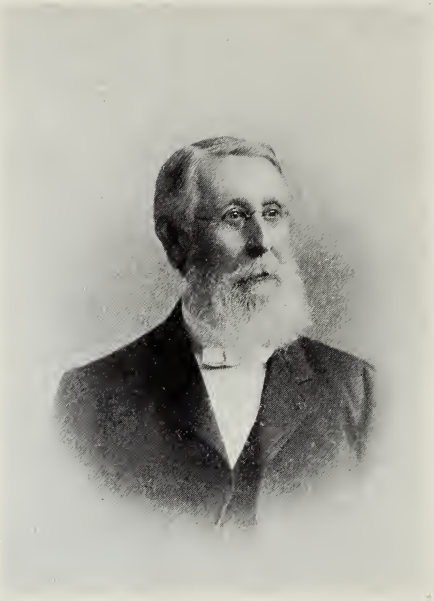
Rev. C. N. Chevrier

rector of the parish, 1863–66

and subscriptions were immediately started to erect a church in his memory. After Dr. May's death, the Rev. C. N. Chevrier followed as Rector, doing a good work, and although only ministering in this Parish for about three years, he made many friends. He was a sincere and devoted pastor. During Mr. Chevrier's rectorate, the question of incorporation and admittance to Convention was steadily contemplated and practical ways and means for the erection of the Church to Dr. May's memory were discussed.

In 1866 the Rev. Joel Rudderow became Rector of the Parish, succeeding Mr. Chevrier, and a charter being granted to the "Rector, Church Wardens and Vestrymen of St. Paul's Memorial," the Parish three years later was duly admitted in 1869 to the Convention, with Caleb Cresson, Esq., and Dr. Charles Wetherill Gumbes as Wardens.

Again do we draw attention to the liberality of Mrs. Rebecca Gumbes, through whose financial aid in great part this building in memory of the Rev. James May, D.D., was built in 1871 and consecrated the year following. Although Mrs. Gumbes did not live to see the completion of her heart's desire, the earnest labors of her followers resulted in the execution of her pious wishes. Deservedly, therefore, is a tribute to the memory of that wise and loving heart engraved



Rev. Joel Rudderow

rector of the parish 1866-1891

on the walls of this temple, and a tablet bearing a suitable inscription was subsequently erected.

Among the archives of the Parish is still to be found the form of services at the laying of the corner-stone of St. Paul's Memorial Church, September 20, 1871, Bishop Stevens officiating, and likewise consecrating the sacred edifice in 1872. This completion of Mrs. Rebecca Gumbes' dearest wish was accomplished during the Rectorate of the Rev. Joel Rudderow, who for twenty-five years enjoyed the confidence and affection of his parishioners.

Much has been recorded regarding the work and associations of Mr. Samuel W. Gumbes in connection with the Parish; but time would fail us were we to even try with any small degree of justice to speak of that most remarkable woman, his wife, Mrs. Frances Sarah Dring Macomb Gumbes, who for the whole of her widowhood (about thirty years) devoted her life and talents in the continuation of her husband's work in this Parish. She was remarkable in her versatility; devoted as a Christian worker; a most cordial hostess; stern in her disapproval of that which might cause even a suspicion of misunderstanding or an evil insinuation, and with it all not a bigoted or narrow-minded Christian. Her character was that of charity personified. Her faith was ever in evidence and her hope abounding in all her works.

View across "Oakland Hall" Lawn

"Oakland Chapel," built 1852 by Mrs. Rebecca Gumbes for her son, Samuel W. Gumbes and his wife, Mrs. Frances S. D. Macomb Gumbes

removed 1896

1470888

Although in the world, she was not of the world; partaking of all the pleasures of life and yet giving them to others at the same time. She never showed that she was discouraged, and had always some good word to say for everyone. No one ever heard her speak evil or unkindly of anyone. As a child she had seen and been caressed by LaFayette. In her youth her agility and feats of activity are remembered with interest, and handed down with loving tradition. It is said that on her wedding-day she ran a foot-race with her bridegroom and defeated him. On one or two notable occasions her physical strength led her into trouble; once particularly into much embarrassment. For many years she was the organist of the little choir at Union Church, which was then led with a small, old-fashioned parlor organ, the bellows of which were operated by an uncovered crank gearing worked by the player with a foot-treadle. On the occasion alluded to, the first verse of the hymn was successfully performed, but as the second verse progressed a mysterious paralysis seemed gradually to overcome the organ; it struggled bravely, but fitfully, and in the seventh line silence fell upon it, much to the wonder of the awed congregation. Silence was broken in a few seconds by the whispered voice of the organist—perfectly audible, however—

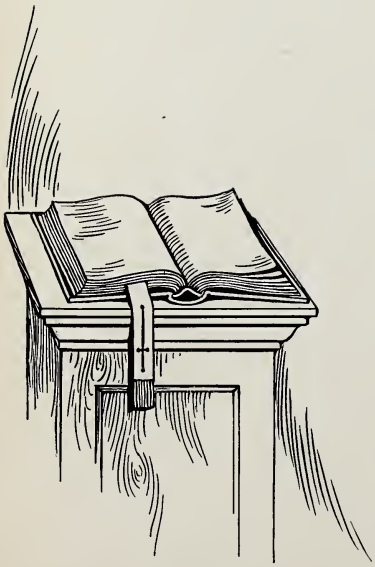
St. Paul's Memorial Church
BUILT 1871. AS IT APPEARED UNTIL 1896

MEMORIAL AT OAKS TO REV. JAMES MAY, D D.

which said: "My dear, my petticoat is caught in the treadle! Get me out!" The good lady's lingerie was cut out with a penknife and unwound, and the hymn brought to a triumphant conclusion.

'Tis needless to speak of the love which everyone bore her. Many hearts beat with affection as those who knew her think of her whose life was, and memory still is, an inspiration to each one. Mrs. Gumbes died on the 14th day of April, 1896. With a peculiar forethought she had even at that early time of the year commenced to make preparations for the following Christmas, and many of the gifts intended for those who were nearest to her heart were completed, or nearly so. Feeling that her end was approaching, she called her young relatives to her side, gave them her gifts, and called down on them the blessings of the most blessed season, and then passed away, peacefully, in her eighty-second year. It was most natural and fitting that after her death the little chapel erected in 1852 on the lawn of "Oakland Hall" should be removed and remodeled and placed as a memorial to Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Wetherill Gumbes, and that the building should be a transept to the Rev. Dr. May's Memorial Church is peculiarly touching. The beautiful thoughts in this connection are many. In the façade of

St. Paul's Church, Oaks, 1909
MEMORIAL TO REV. DR. MAY



the memorial transept, above the large west window outside in the wall, may be seen a tablet bearing the two dates, 1852–1896. The original furnishings, as well as the pulpit used for over forty years, were placed in the new memorial building. The bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel W. Gumbes, as well as a number of persons whose lives were closely associated with the work of the Parish, repose in the consecrated cemetery, side by side, awaiting the call of Our Father, "when death shall be swallowed up in victory."

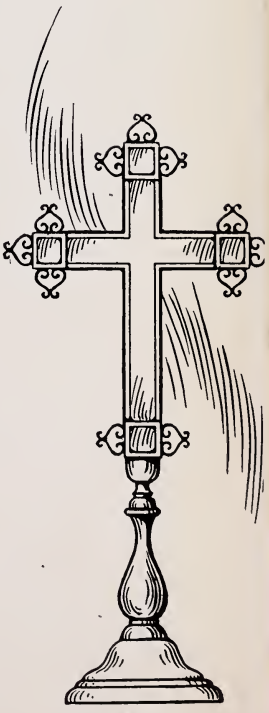
In this connection it is interesting to note the placing of Dr. May's remains and those of his wife in the cemetery of this, his Memorial Church. The credit of this interesting work is due to the Wardens of the church, Caleb Cresson, Esq., and Dr. Charles W. Gumbes, who, with the kind assistance of William H. Wetherill, Esq., arranged with Dr. May's relatives for the successful culmination of the plans. A special piece of ground was set apart to be the pastor's last earthly resting-place, and his grave has been visited by many.

During our sketch we have spoken of the several Rectors, each of whom ministered faithfully in the Parish, and we now, with affectionate regard, would speak of the late Rev. Benjamin J. Douglass, who, in 1892, followed as Rector after the Rev. Mr. Rudderow's death. The Rev. Mr.

Rev. Benjamin J. Douglass
rector of the parish 1892-1901

Douglass' rectorate was the result of his great regard for all who had been associated here, both as clergy and as lay members. He was himself connected by ties of marriage to the Wetherill family, and his father had officiated in the Parish during its early history. For nine years the Rev. Benjamin J. Douglass was the Rector, and during that time his faithful pastoral visitations won for him the love, affection and respect not only of his own congregation, but also of all with whom he came in contact. Gentle in disposition, he was ever ready with a helping hand to aid the suffering and afflicted. He was also a generous man, and did much good for the poor, of which there can never be made an earthly record. It was during Mr. Douglass' rectorship and through his efforts that the cemetery was consecrated in 1896 by Bishop Whitaker, thus sanctifying, by religious rite, by the word of God and by prayer, that piece of ground as "God's Acre," where the dead in Christ may peacefully sleep till their Lord and Master, who is the Resurrection and the Life, shall descend from heaven with the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God.

After the death of the Rev. Mr. Douglass, in 1901, the Rev. Thompson P. Ege became Rector, during which time the Parish showed a quiet but healthy growth. The love and devotion for this



View of Consecrated Cemetery of St. Paul's Memorial, Oaks

taken about 1908

Rev. T. P. Ege and Vested Choir, 1908

rector of the parish, 1901-1908

Parish and its interests, on the part of several faithful descendants of the Founder made it possible, during the rectorship of Mr. Ege, to accomplish definite results, and the Parish was organized to a considerable degree. The co-operation of the people living in the whole community was urged and solicited to such an extent that the people all began to have a mind to work.

The efforts of the Rev. Mr. Ege have not been without most admirable backing also from his parishioners generally, even to a very remarkable extent of faithfulness and loyalty. If in years past the former Rectors had received as much co-operation from as many people of education and means as was given to Mr. Ege, greater things would have been accomplished before this time. The present generation must not therefore neglect to appreciate the faithful efforts of the few dependable persons who in the years gone by upheld the efforts of the earlier clergy and "kept the light burning" in all seasons of the year. Surely the results of those past years are the more remarkable when one considers the many obstacles with which the pathways were strewn. To-day the people of the Parish realize the importance of assisting in maintaining the Church's influence and are being drawn to regular attendance.

Interior St. Paul's Memorial, Oaks

St. Paul's Memorial, Oaks

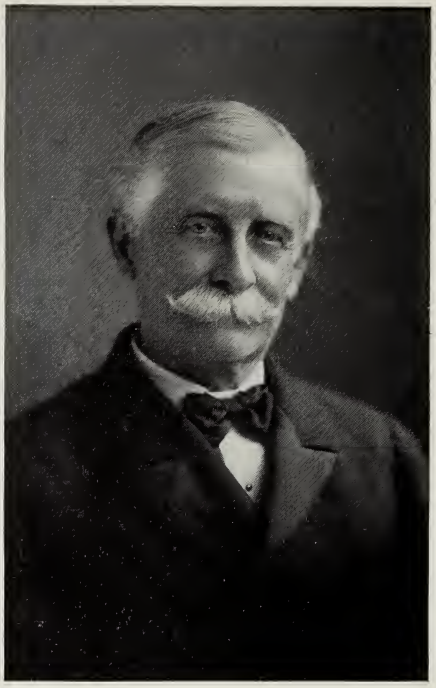
Photo taken 1908 on a warm Sunday afternoon, showing good congregation. No notice had been given that the photo would be taken that day. Rector and Choir, with Wardens, can be recognized, also the Sexton of the Parish since 1869.

The Baptisms and Confirmations recorded during the rectorship of the Rev. Mr. Ege have been the result of the co-operation which he received from his laity, for without sincere helpers filled with a zealous love for the Master's work a clergyman can do but little. By living in the midst of his parishioners, gifted with a rare choice of words, the ministrations of the Rev. Mr. Ege were commendable.

On account of his advancing years, it was deemed advisable to accept his resignation.

Regular Vestry meetings, the organization of the women into a Guild, and the starting as well as maintenance of the Vested Choir of girls and boys and men, are amongst the particularly notable events in the Parish organization during Mr. Ege's rectorate, ending in 1908.

No record of the Parish would be complete without at least again the mention of him whose work for more than fifty years has made it possible to maintain the Parish churches in their continuance. When quite a lad he visited within this Parish and early learned to love its work and possibilities. Appreciating the efforts of Mr. Samuel W. Gumbes, he began as a young man to assist that good man in his work within this Parish. Even in those early days Caleb Cresson was found dependable and ever ready in every good and excellent work for the Master.



Caleb Cresson

ACTIVE IN THE PARISH ADMINISTRATIONS
SINCE 1859

Caleb Cresson was born in 1839, the son of William Penn and Susan Vaux Cresson, and he has always shown himself a Christian Churchman and gentleman of earnest and sincere type. He was instructed by the Rev. Dr. Alexander H. Vinton, for some time Rector of Holy Trinity Church, Philadelphia, in whose Parish his father and mother were communicants.

Mr. Cresson's practical ability and his untiring regularity in attendance upon the Church services at all seasons of the year, still evidence his desire to uphold the clergy. Delighting in the minutest details of the parochial work, he has been the Rector's Warden and a Delegate to the Diocesan Convention since the admission of the Parish in 1869. His faithfulness in the care of the two church properties has been conspicuous and his rare combination of firmness and courtesy will long be remembered. He has given most generously of his time and means, and in all things shown himself most dependable. His judgment of men and of the policy to be pursued in this Parish has always been markedly sound.

The following persons were so identified with the Parish history that their names and deeds should be recorded:

Charles Wetherill Gumbes, M.D.

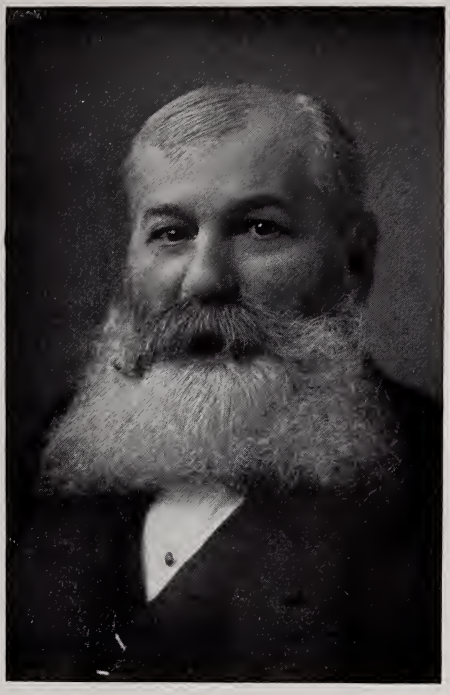
Son of Samuel W. Gumbes and Frances S. D. Macomb, his wife. A charter member and Trustee of the Parish, Accounting Warden for many years. Organist of the Parish and always interested in the music, he gave of his talents. He ministered without charge to the poor of the Parish and was much beloved. A regular communicant and faithful in his duties as a Vestryman, he represented the Parish at the Diocesan Convention for a number of years. Surgeon in the Civil War, he was a patriot and was loved by his comrades of the Grand Army of the Republic. For many years he was Librarian of the Sunday School. He presented the church organs to the Parish and was, although a great sufferer in his declining years, always most interested in the details of the Parish work. His children and grandchildren are still worshipers in the Parish. He is buried with his wife in the cemetery at Oaks.

ISABELLA B. (GUMBES) CRESSON

Wife of Caleb Cresson and daughter of Samuel W. Gumbes and Frances S. D. Macomb, his wife. From her childhood days, a dependable worker in the Parish and interested in its activities. A consistent Christian. A regular Sunday School teacher, regular also and constant at the Church Services without regard to the weather conditions. An example of prayerful living. A devoted and faithful wife. A Christian mother, whose memory will always be cherished with greatest affection. In her home life an example of holy living, and through her quiet influence she caused the family prayers to be regularly maintained. Herself a representative of the fourth generation of her family worshiping in this Parish, she sees her grandchildren beginning to carry on their share of this most excellent work.

Rev. Joseph Bloomfield Wetherill
(Photograph taken about 1880)

Son of Dr. Wm. Wetherill and Isabella Ramsay Macomb, his wife. Although never Rector of this Parish, he was from his early childhood interested in its welfare and frequently spent his summers in this country Parish, which he loved so dearly. Studying for Holy Orders in later life, after his ordination, he did a noble work amongst the poor and lowly. He was a co-worker with the Rev. Dr. Morgan Dix, of New York, a remarkable friendship existing between them. For a number of years during the summer months, Rev. Mr. Wetherill assisted the Rector in the Churches of this Parish. He is remembered for his devotion to the interests of the Church, and his courage in defending the Faith. He made all people revere the worship of the Church, and taught them to better understand their ancient heritage and gave them a more noble appreciation of the Holy Sacraments. Explaining with care the historic significance of the beautiful ceremonies of the Church, his visits left their bettering influence upon the minds of the people, and they were educated to look upon the Church with more seemly and proper ideals than was their wont before his time. He will be remembered by those who particularly appreciated his talents, because his main object seemed to be to encourage the people to cherish the Faith once delivered unto the Saints and to endeavor to devoutly continue the worship of Almighty God in the beauty of holiness. He died in 1885, and is buried at Oaks, in the St. Paul's Cemetery.

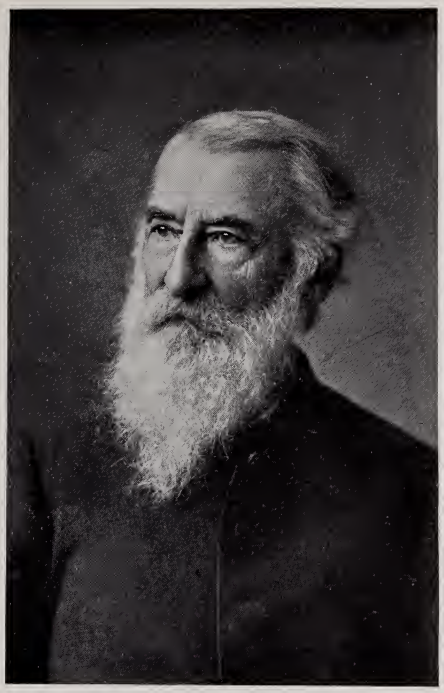


William Henry Wetherill

A brother of the Rev. J. Bloomfield Wetherill. He is the present owner of Mill Grove and a regular worshiper in the Parish during the summer months and when other opportunity may afford. It was he who presented the Baptismal Font, the Credence Table, Cushions, Bible Markers and the beautiful brass "Shekinah" to the Union Church. In many ways he has shown his interest in the Parish activities by giving of his means. He also presented the printed Creed and Lord's Prayer to the St. Paul's Memorial Church. It is largely due to his kind encouragement that the completion of this record of the Parish has been thus far consummated. It has always been his desire to do his share, because, as he says, according to the Scripture, "The people have a mind to work."

Maria Lawrence (Wetherill) Janeway

Wife of the Rev. Dr. Janeway. She was a regular attendant, and until her death she gave towards the support of the Parish. A good wife, a loving mother, her memory is cherished by those who were privileged to know her. Her children and grandchildren still worship regularly and are supporters of the Church work. She died in 1890 and is buried at Oaks.



Rev. John Livingston Janeway, D.D.

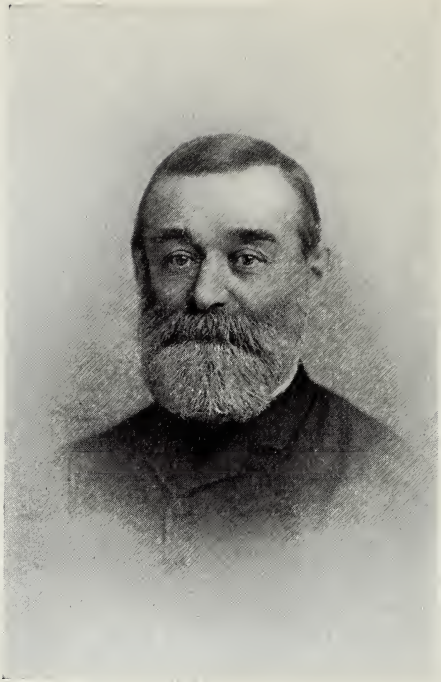
He was a good man and filled with the spirit of Christian charity. Of remarkably kindly disposition and gifted with an excellent mind and understanding of the Holy Gospel. He married Maria Lawrence Wetherill, and for the closing twenty years of his life on earth lived in our Parish. Although he was a Presbyterian minister, he saw his children and grandchildren become confirmed, and rejoiced also to have them regular as communicants of the Episcopal Church. During the Civil War he volunteered as a Chaplain. He was a fighter for the Union and was a power for good amongst the men: he had a large following amongst the soldiers. Upon several occasions he addressed the congregations and was noted for his courtesy and respect toward the Rectors of this Parish. He was also a regular attendant at Divine Worship, following the Services with his Prayer Book and responding heartily with the Congregation. His actions showed his respect and love for the Parish, and his affection for the cause of Christ in our midst caused him to rejoice in the Church's advancement. He passed away over ninety years of age, and was buried in the cemetery at Oaks. Those who had the honor of knowing him intimately, and there are many, testify to his truly generous spirit, especially in all Christian matters. He was courageous as well as kind.

William H. Gumbes

Eldest son of Samuel W. Gumbes and Frances S. D. Macomb, his wife. Succeeded as Trustee of the Union Church after his father's death, acting in co-operation with his brother, Dr. Chas. W. Gumbes, and his brother-in-law, Caleb Cresson, Trustees of the Parish and charter members when same was incorporated in 1866. Photograph taken about 1860. He died in 1879 and is buried at Oaks, in the St. Paul's Cemetery.

Rachel W. (Janeway) Hodge
Organist of the Parish for many years

The daughter of Dr. Janeway and Maria Lawrence Wetherill. For a number of years she was the faithful organist in the churches of the Parish. Although living at a considerable distance from the places of worship, yet in summer time her continuance to what she considered her duty in helping in the Praises of the Lord should not be unrecorded. A few years of happy married life with her husband, and she was taken hence in 1896 and is buried in the cemetery at Oaks.

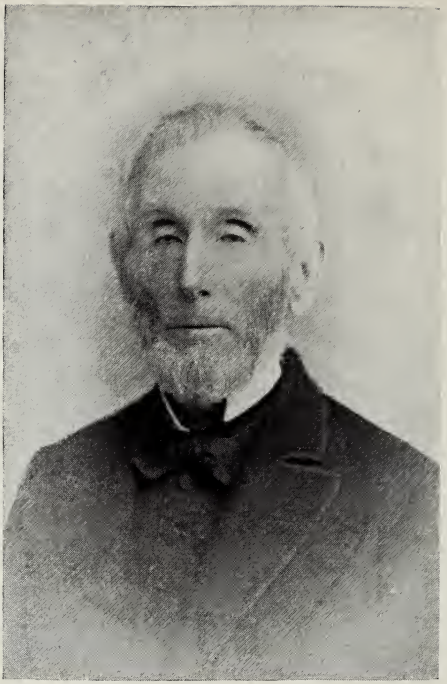


Charles Foster

For many years interested in this Parish. A charter member when same was incorporated. He loved children. Upon a particular occasion it is remembered that when he was advised that a lad of about twelve years of age was in the habit of reading the Morning Prayers of the Church on Sundays to some children and several amused grown-up persons, this good man, Charles Foster, went to the child and spoke kindly to him and took so much interest in the youthful inspiration, that as the lad grew older he understood why the remarkable publications of Charles Foster, "The Story of the Bible, etc.," have done so much good to the people, both young and old. Mr. Foster was a student of human nature, and his kindly affection, shown particularly towards the young people of the Parish, is worthy of remembrance.

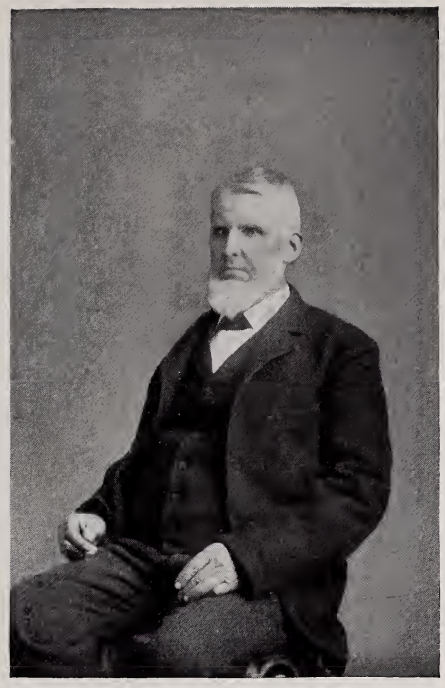
EMILY M. FOSTER

Wife of Charles Foster, daughter of Samuel Price Wetherill and Martha Wikoff. Living for a number of years at Mill Grove, she and her good husband were regular attendants at Divine Worship. She was a Sunday School teacher of this Parish, having marked ability, and is remembered still with sincere affection by some of the older residents of the Parish who, as children, were led to know more of Christ by her teachings. This photograph was taken about 1870.



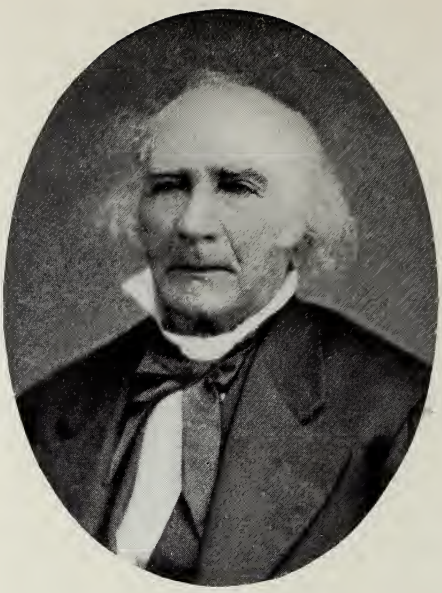
Charles Porter Shannon

A charter member of the Parish when same was incorporated. He was Treasurer of the Building Fund for the Memorial Church built in memory of the Rev. James May, D.D., at Oaks. During the closing years of his life he was a regular attendant at Divine Worship in this Parish, and as he had always been a good man, he gave generously of his means towards the support of the Parish. He founded the "Shannon Fund" for giving financial aid to the poor in this Parish, and his forethought has been most helpful to many persons in distress. His name cannot be forgotten, although the village where he lived was for many years called for him "Shannonville." It is now perhaps more properly called "Audubon." Mr. Shannon was a devout communicant and a Churchman of sterling characteristics. He is buried in the cemetery of St. James' Church, at Evansburg, where also lie his nearest of kin.



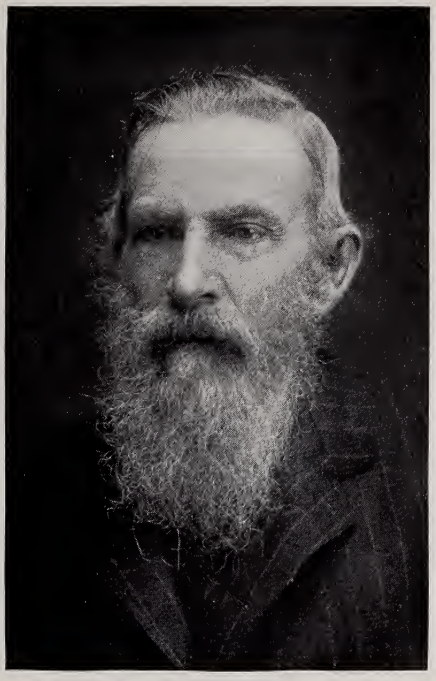
CHARLES T. DAVIS

Although for a number of years a great sufferer, and during the closing years of his life is unable to be in touch with the Parish activities, his earlier years of usefulness and his unselfish work for the churches is worthy of record. He was a charter member when the Parish was incorporated. A Vestryman for a number of years, he also represented the Parish as one of the Delegates to the Diocesan Convention. As long as health permitted he was most regular in his attendance at Divine Worship always bringing a carriage full of relatives and joining heartily in the Services of the Church.



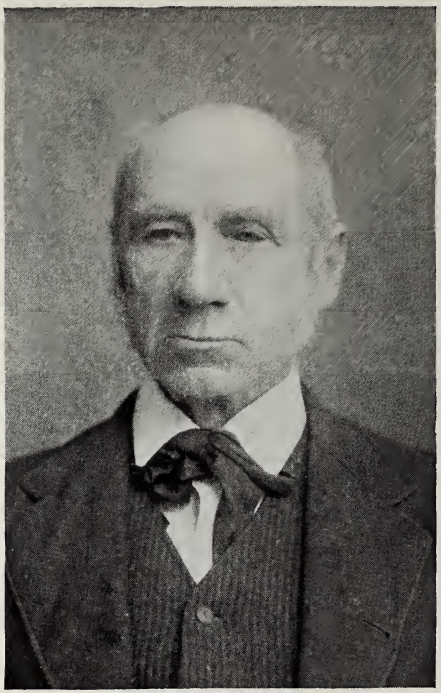
GEORGE MILLER

Because of his faithful services as Sexton until 1872, his picture is shown here. Taken about 1875. He was a communicant and interested in the Parish welfare, serving the Church, not because of remuneration, which was very small, but because of his disposition, which was kindly and good. He died in 1876.



Christian Plush Miller

Sexton of the Parish Churches and still faithfully dependable. He followed in service shortly before the death of his father, George Miller.



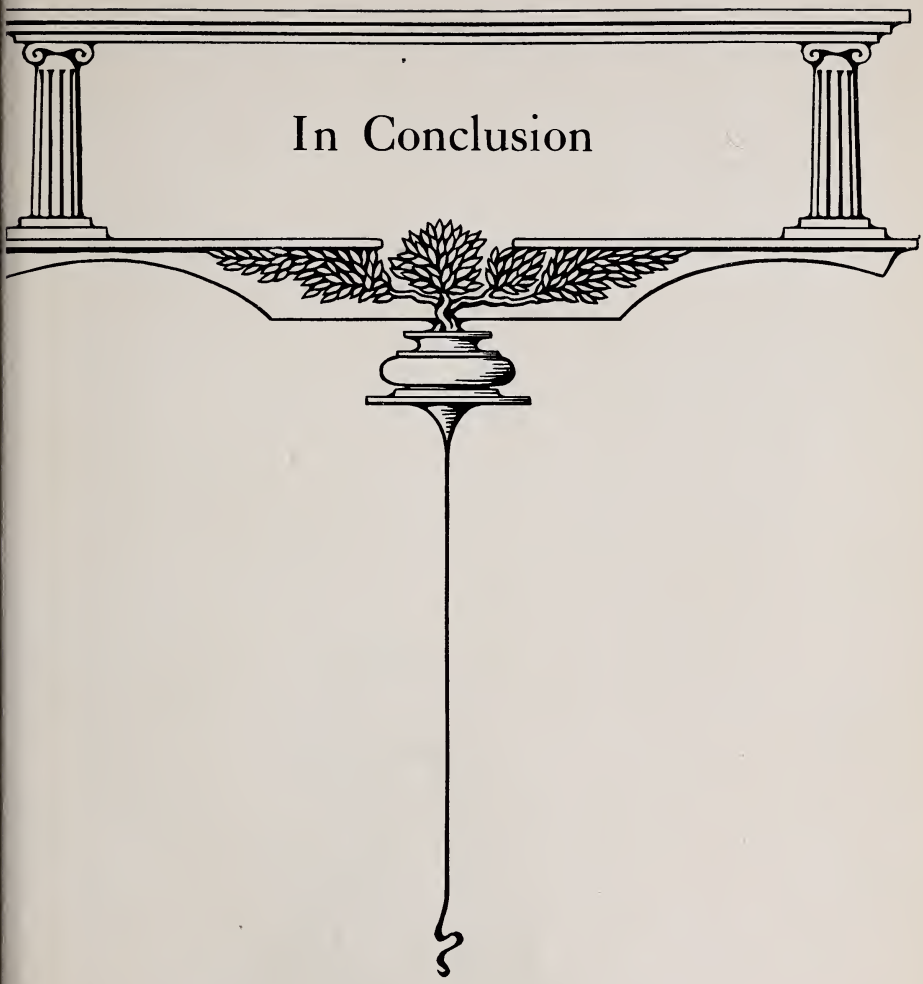
JOSEPH BURGENTS

A regular Communicant and always faithful at the places of Prayer. His children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren have been made "Members of Christ," and now worship in the Parish Churches. He died in 1900 and is buried at Oaks.

Elizabeth W. Hall

Niece of the Rev. George Mintzer; she was truly a most faithful Sunday School teacher of the Parish. She labored with us for more than fifty years and lived to see five generations of one family worship in this Parish. She was constant and dependable in her regularity, until the infirmities of age made it impossible for her to longer remain in the community. She is remembered with affectionate regard. She died during the summer of 1908.

In Conclusion



In Conclusion

BEFORE we bring this sketch to an end, we desire with all reverence to thank God for the good examples of His creatures, those noble men and women whose names have been particularly mentioned in this historical sketch. They should be ever remembered and several of them especially as "Pillars of the Church." Some of these people, thank God, as far as we of the younger generation are concerned, still labor with us in this portion of the Master's vineyard, but many have been called home. For those who are gone we sorrow, not as them which have no hope. We have a reasonable confidence in Him who doeth all things well; and from the examples of all those Saints who from their labors rest we can obtain encouragement to do our share while we have opportunity in the time of this mortal life.

Our new Rector, the Rev. George William Barnes, whose coming amongst us dates from the first of January, this year (1909), is a man of practical Christianity and sincere spirituality. Realizing the great opportunity of this missionary field of about thirty square miles, he has already begun an indexing of all the families.

Many of the homes within these Parish boundaries have never been visited by any former Rector, and some of the people have never been visited by any Christian minister.

Let none weary in well-doing, and may all with one heart and mind assist and co-operate in this most excellent work; and, although having tenderest traditional associations to many who may read these pages, yet let them remember that the work has now become intensely practical in its scope and possibilities. The Parish activities are now entering upon a new period of advancement and progress wherein the Church's Historic Apostolic Order will be more generally appreciated, respected, loved and sought for. The new Rector has the confidence and affectionate regard of all his people to a remarkable degree, and with the Divine Blessing assured, where fervent effectual prayers are continually rendered, we doubt not but that much will be accomplished to the Eternal Glory of the Ever Blessed Trinity.

If we were asked just what results could be shown as the outcome of all these past years' efforts, it might appear to some persons that the records would not seem to indicate much definite growth, and, indeed, such is the case as far as local numbers are to be received as evidences; but shall we forget the influence of the Church,

which indeed has been very great on the minds and hearts of the young people who have first learned of Christian teachings in this Parish? Many of these young people as they have grown up have moved away to the cities.

It has ever been a fact that the rural parish feeds the city churches with people continually moving to the urban districts. We are continually reminded that such is the case, and for that very reason it is all the more important that these people should have been taught a love for the Church, that when they go into the cities they will feel at home in the Church where the services are familiar. If the proper organization is carried out and energy displayed in the rural Parish, then the city church will reap the harvest of people whose early recollections were in our country parishes.

This Parish has been doing a great work during all these years. It must and can do a greater work, but it should not at this late time in its existence ask for aid from the Convocation or Diocese. It has always been able to be considered "self-supporting." It has never asked aid from any but from those who know of its excellent work and who have generously supported its activities. But the work must continue, not only because of the general good of the cause, but because there are real evidences to make the work of greater local good.

The time has come when we can reasonably expect great increases in our local population and the Parish must be prepared to meet the requirements. The Parish must be prepared to carry on an aggressive work amongst its own people, and if it is able to do this work, no newcomers will seek another place of worship and no other places of worship will be necessary. The needs, therefore, are for a guaranteed income to be derived from a sufficient endowment to more largely defray the current expenses of the Parish. To-day we are dependent largely upon the generosity of spasmodic donations, which if not received would make it impossible to continue this practical work. But it does seem that if any readers of this sketch would care to assist in raising the endowment which is now small, but which is growing, they should do so either now or provide for the same in the future.

If those who have been giving Three Dollars a year would provide that One Hundred Dollars be added to the Endowment Fund, either now or by their will, then that amount of income would not cease with their passing away. The same would apply in like proportion to larger donations.

MAY God grant that those who have read these pages will be led to help in the continuance of the blessed work for the Master, as opportunity may be given. That everything may continue in decency and order, and that the people will proceed in all "virtue and Godliness of living" to the honor and glory of the Ever Blessed Trinity. So be it.

THOSE who may consider leaving a bequest that the income may be used to defray the Parish expenses, the following title will sufficiently identify the Parish and the use of its corporate name will cause no misunderstanding: "Rector, Church Wardens and Vestrymen of St. Paul's Memorial Church, Upper Providence, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania."

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